



U.S. EMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMERICAN CONNECTIONS

AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES NEWSLETTER

San Jose, Costa Rica

DECEMBER 2011

Contact Us:

Regular Hours: 2519-2000

Emergency Hours: 8863-4895

Fax: 220-2455

E-mail:

acssanjose@state.gov

Web Page:

<http://costarica.usembassy.gov/>

**American Citizen Services
Hours of Operation**

Monday:

8am-11:30am and 1pm-3pm

Tuesday-Friday

8am-11:30am

Follow us on the web:



NEW APPOINTMENT SYSTEM!

Please note that all
ROUTINE SERVICES are
now available by
APPOINTMENT ONLY.

Appointments can be made
clicking [here](#).

Editor: Lea P. Rivera



We would like to wish you and your family a very happy holidays and a healthy and prosperous.

2011! May we all benefit from the wisdom of one of our Founding Fathers who once said:

“Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man” — Benjamin Franklin

In this Issue

This is the inaugural issue of the ACS newsletter. We welcome your feedback and thoughts on issues that you would like to highlight. Please email us at acssanjose@state.gov.

Features in this Issue:

- [Staying Safe in Costa Rica](#)
- [Featuring the work of Un Caribe Mas Seguro](#)
- [The U.S. Embassy in the Community](#)
- [American Citizen Services: Updates and FAQs](#)
- [American Citizen Services : Searching for Regional Wardens](#)

2012 U.S. Embassy Holiday Schedule

New Year's Day	January 2
Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday	January 16
President's Day	February 20
Holy Thursday	April 5
Good Friday	April 6
Juan Santamaria	April 16
Labor Day (Costa Rica)	May 1
Memorial Day	May 28
Independence Day	July 4
Annexation of Guanacaste	July 25
Our Lady of Los Angeles	August 2
Mother's Day	August 15
Labor Day (U.S.)	September 3
Independence Day	September 14
Columbus Day	October 8
Cultures Day	October 15
Veterans Day	November 12
Thanksgiving Day	November 22
Christmas Day	December 25

STAYING SAFE IN COSTA RICA

The Changing Security Climate

A recent article in La Nacion written by Jaime Daremblum, former Costa Rican Ambassador to the United States, highlighted the increasing crime statistics in the region.

Among the statistics featured:

- In the last decade, the homicide rate in Costa Rica has nearly doubled.
- Central America has 14% of the world's population but nearly 30% of the homicides in the world occurred on this continent.
- There are more private security guards than policemen.

Ambassador Daremblum goes on to describe the growing struggle against organized crime and drugs. Additionally, the easy access to guns and other arms has resulted in an unending cycle of crime and violence. The article is a stark reminder that while Costa Rica is a relatively peaceful country, personal safety and security should always be paramount.

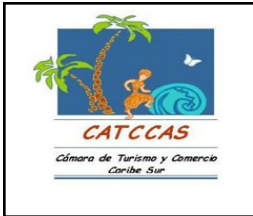
If you are the victim of a crime, report it to the OIJ police who are able to take your report, and also to the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy at 2519-2000 (during work hours) and 8863-8495(after work hours), or by email to: consularsanjose@state.gov. The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the U.S. Embassy. This allows the Embassy to make the necessary notifications that may help catch criminals, including terrorists, who try to buy or use U.S. passports.

The embassy recently produced a video about being vigilant of your surroundings. We encourage you to watch it and share with others—<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t44RleciwQw>

OTHER EMBASSY RESOURCES

- Download the **FREE Smart Traveler Ipad App!** It's a useful tool that provides you with easy access easy access to frequently updated official country information, travel alerts, travel warnings, maps, U.S. embassy locations, and more.
- We encourage ALL Americans who are living in Costa Rica to please register on the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Your enrollment in STEP allows U.S. to get in contact with you in an event of an emergency and to inform you of any relevant embassy information. Whether you have lived in Costa Rica for several years or just a few months, please register [here](#).
- Follow the U.S. Embassy on the web through our website, facebook page, twitter, flickr or youtube.





UN CARIBE MAS SEGURO

For the inaugural issue of the ACS newsletter, we asked Eric Haller of Un Caribe Mas Seguro to write a feature piece on the community safety work they are doing in the South Caribbean area. The group has done some interesting work in this region and the article below describes their work as well as share best practices.

OVERVIEW:

There have been community anti-crime organizations in the South Caribbean for years, dealing with crime issues typical of any tourist beach town: assaults, robberies, and less occasionally, attacks of a more violent nature. Attendance at various neighborhood watch groups tended to follow a cyclical pattern that spiked with the occurrence of higher profile crimes then rapidly diminished.

A meeting in San Jose in 2010 with Jorge Rojas, Director of OIJ, drove home the point that, owing to the extremely low percentage of crimes reported (estimated to be in the mid to low teens), the canton of Talamanca had, on paper at least, one the lowest crime rates in the country. Without the statistics in the form of *denuncias*, the area received fewer personnel and resources than the conditions in the zone called for.

As a response, we created an online database with which the community could report crimes and compile its own statistics, to gain a clearer picture of what was occurring, to identify problem regions and recurring patterns that might aid in prevention, as well as to demonstrate that the incident rate was far greater than was being captured in official numbers. Several barriers existed to adoption, chiefly a strong reluctance, in a town whose economy relies almost solely on tourism, to openly discuss crime for fear of jeopardizing commerce.

A facebook group was launched, and the ability to see and discuss in near real time how crime is affecting the neighborhood proved a compelling experience. A consensus developed that there was far more to be gained than lost from this sort of open discussion. The group expanded very rapidly, and people motivated each other to get active in the effort.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY:

Members of the community have met regularly with the Director of OIJ, Ministers of Public Security, Fiscal General, etc in order to bring to attention the needs of the communities Southern Caribbean. The police chief actively reaches out to the community through regular public meetings and online through the Facebook group. Similar meetings occur with the Fiscalía. The Mayor of Talamanca is also very involved, offering full support and participation in the efforts of the local community and maintaining an active Facebook profile.



UN CARIBE MAS SEGURO: PROJECTS

During the past year, Un Caribe Mas Seguro has continued their work and undertaken new projects. Some highlighted projects:

Online database of Incidents Has become the primary source of information used by Fuerza Publica. The website also shares information on prevention, who to call, how to act and much more information of importance to the local community. <http://www.caribeseguro.com>

Convenio between CATCCAS and Ministerio de Seguridad Publica, which provides a legal framework for binding agreements of cooperation between MSP and the community.

Streetlight project: a digital inventory map of major streetlights in the region indicating where lights were present, where they needed to be replaced and where they needed to be installed. This would eliminate some of the “dark zones” where tourists were regularly being assaulted at night. The map was used to petition ICE into addressing the issues.

Digital map project: Requested by the Fuerza Publica in order to better identify the local streets and location of residents and businesses. A new police officer receiving a call to person x's house will be able to pull up that person's location on a computer screen at the delegation and speed the response time.

Rise in Official Denuncias: Victims who saw little hope of individual justice started filing denuncias for the benefit to the community as a whole that arises from more accurate reporting and statistics.

Fuerza Publica Capacitacion: Security training program and certification for businesses was offered in June.

Beach Guard Program: ARECHIPU - Association of Residents Playa Chiquita Punta Uva have organized to hire three local beach guards. Guards patrol the beaches, caution tourists who are not being careful and report suspicious behavior to police. Since the inception of the program, the previous average of 1 incident per day has been reduced to nearly zero.

Victim's Assistance: The Victim Assistance Program helps both locals and tourists through an often complicated judicial process. It supports tourist victims with translation services, helps to file denuncias, helps to cancel stolen credit cards, contacts embassies, offers transportation to OIJ, etc. In the case of more serious crimes, the program helps to coordinate additional nights at hotels and meals in local restaurants so the victim can complete the denuncia process without incurring additional expenses. The program has been successful in turning victims' encounter with crime from “a very negative experience in a foreign country” to “the community cares - what a great place”.

Hotel and Business Certification Program: Project under development to establish guidelines and a certification program in crime prevention for local hotels and businesses.



UN CARIBE MAS SEGURO: BEST PRACTICES

Lessons Learned and Best Practices:

Law enforcement in Costa Rica faces the reality of needing to do more with less, and without the communication, cooperation, and trust of the communities they work in, they will be at a grave disadvantage.

We consider a program like ours critical to the success of citizen security, and elements that in our experience are essential are:

- 1) Forum: enables the community to be in direct contact with each other and with law enforcement. We are fortunate to have a police chief, Leandro Chaverri, who was highly receptive to the idea and very motivated, and we used Facebook because of the high adoption rate and its “stickiness”.
- 2) Incident Database: a tool for the community to keep track of what is occurring is key. As well, it demonstrates to law enforcement that the community is a serious partner, and is dynamically and independently evaluating their work.
- 3) Regular Meetings: While the communication afforded through the internet is extremely powerful, face-to-face meetings are critical as well.



Members of Un Caribe Mas Seguro renovating the police station in Punta Uva



Meeting with local police and community members

SERVING THE COMMUNITY: LIMON

The U.S. government supports social and economic development in other countries in an effort to promote peaceful and democratic institutions. The U.S. Embassy contributes to these efforts by working in partnership with the Costa Rican government to make this country and the world a better, greener, and more prosperous place. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has stated, investments in healthcare promote social and economic progress, and support the rise of capable partners who can help solve regional and global problems.

In October, the U.S. government donated an ambulance to the Bambú de Talamanca community. The government also helped build the medical clinic in Bambú de Talamanca in 2009. However, the clinic did not have the means to transport people previously. The ambulance will transport patients to and from the Bambú clinic, as well as transport patients from the clinic that require additional care to other medical facilities in the region.

The U.S. government funded the construction of a new clinic in the village of Amubri, a community of approximately 10,000 residents. Amubri is located in a remote inland section of the Alta Talamanca region, and is only accessible by conducting a river fording or crossing by boat. The new clinic building provides facilities for basic medical and dental care, and is designed to withstand moderate earthquakes and hurricane force winds.

A cornerstone of sustainable economic development is investment in both health and education. For this reason, the ambassador also visited with Peace Corps volunteers who work as teachers and students from the Instituto de Excelencia General Básica Limón 2000. The embassy is also funding the renovation and construction is currently underway at the Ojo de Agua School in Limon. The school serves approximately 100 middle school aged children. 2 new classroom buildings are being constructed, in addition to new bathroom facilities. Current plans include equipping the school with necessary furniture and equipment, to include approximately 15 computers. Construction is 50% complete with an estimated date of completion of January 2012.



AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES: Updates and FAQ's

CONSULAR UPDATES

Consular Section Visits Dominical

The consular section recently visited a well-attended meeting in Dominical with the Crime Awareness and Prevention Organization (CAP). We had the opportunity to hear about their security concerns and their successful attempts to help deter crime with the installation of security cameras. The group has over 300 members on its outreach list and has proactively worked with the local community to promote safety and security. The leaders of CAP also highlighted the importance of face to face monthly meetings to distribute pertinent information, hear members' concerns and to give the opportunity for the community to interact with one another.

U.S. consular embassy staff meeting with CAP members.



New Appointment System

Please note that all ROUTINE including passport renewal or replacement, additional passport pages, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad (CRBA), and notary services are available by **APPOINTMENT ONLY**. Appointments can be made by clicking [here](#).

FAQs

How can I let the U.S. Embassy know that I reside here or will be traveling to Costa Rica?

ALL American citizens are encouraged to register their travel and presence by going to <https://travelregistration.state.gov>

How can I meet with U.S. Embassy to discuss the security situation in my region?

The Embassy consular section plans to conduct regional visits in 2012 where we will be providing general embassy services as well. Please email us at acssanjose@state.gov if you would like to help us organize an event in your region. Please register at <https://travelregistration.state.gov> to ensure that you will receive information about our regional visits.

How can I find out the latest embassy news?

Follow us on the web:



AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES: Searching for Wardens

The U.S. Embassy is looking for wardens to help U.S. facilitate communication between the embassy and the American community. More information is provided below.

If you are interested in serving as warden, please contact Lea Rivera (rivalp@state.gov)

WHAT IS A WARDEN?

- A private American citizen resident in a foreign country who volunteers to assist consular sections in disaster preparedness, welfare & whereabouts, and alerting fellow Americans to emergency situations.
- Wardens often have close ties to the U.S. expat community; therefore they are often the fastest and most effective route to distributing information to Americans and are essential when normal communication channels fail.
- They facilitates distribution of routine administrative information (changes in section work hours, procedures, embassy closures, voting information) of interest to the U.S. private community
- Wardens provide important, timely, safety and security information, which might include the times and locations of upcoming local demonstrations, areas of potential unrest due to local celebrations or elections, or information about a specific medical issue.

WARDEN COMMUNICATION METHODS

The U.S. State Department is constantly looking for new ways to distribute information to the public, so we are open to suggestions. U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide rely on different communication methods to disseminate information to wardens and stay in touch with them:

- Email/ Text messages (SMS): Most commonly used
- Telephone, Radios and Faxes: In distant locations that lack the infrastructure and communication technology
- Community Online Blogs and Social Networks (Twitter, Facebook)

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

- Providing updates about the situation in their district
- Assisting/encouraging the registration of newcomers
- Assisting in crisis: natural disasters, civil unrest
- Alerting American citizens without immediate e-mail or internet access to emergency situations
- Disseminating information about routine topics such as voter registration, income tax season, new passport procedures, and other non-security related issues.

